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AUTHOR Zahn-Waxler, Carolyn; Chapman, Michael
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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to determine whether different forms of child misdemeanors lead predictably to given types of parental discipline. Twenty-four mothers and their children, who ranged in age from 10 to 20 months, participated in the study for a 9-month period. Mothers were trained to report their children's behaviors and their own socialization practices in narrative, sequential, tape-recorded reports of their children's responses to the positive and negative emotions expressed in the familial environment. Mother and child behaviors were also assessed by home observers during 14 home visits. One finding was that immediately following a transgression, mothers were more likely to use verbal prohibitions than any other type of discipline and that if children did not comply to initial discipline, mothers used additional discipline. Additional results showed that children who were frequently implicated in harm to persons were especially likely to have mothers who used explanation, while children who were frequently involved in property damage were likely to receive physical punishment and unlikely to hear explanations. Frequent lapses of self control in children were reliably associated with mothers' relatively frequent use of love withdrawal. Other results are presented and discussed and implications for issues of child abuse are examined. (JMB)

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The Effects of Children's Transgressions on Parents' Methods of Discipline

Carolyn Zahn-Waxler and Michael Chapman

Laboratory of Developmental Psychology, NIMH

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Parents use a range of disciplinary practices which are intended to terminate inappropriate behaviors and to develop alternative courses of action in their children. The influences of different methods of discipline (e.g., power assertive vs. inductive control techniques on the developing child has been a common theme in socialization theory and research on children's personality development. There has been little parallel consideration of the antecedents of the different methods of discipline. What determines, for example, the conditions under which a parent will hit a child, explain, scold, or isolate the child following transgression? The precursors of physical punishment and love withdrawal are of special interest since these two discipline techniques, in the extreme, may constitute conditions of child abuse and child neglect, respectively. Though the different methods of discipline(s) used probably reflect enduring attributes and philosophies of caret akers, there is reason to expect that behaviors of the child will also influence the types of discipline used.

In this research we are asking whether different forms of child misdemeanors lead predictably to given types of discipline. The focus is on three categories of child behaviors that parents often perceive as undesirable and requiring intervention: (a) transgressions against persons, i.e., hurting others; (b) destruction of property, i.e., hurting things; and (c) difficulties in the maintenance of self control, and in the modulation of negative emotions. One might speculate, for example, that children's impulsive, explosive

behaviors would elicit corresponding negative affect and possibly power assertive methods of discipline by the parent. Methodological constraints and issues of accessibility have often made it difficult to obtain reliable and valid information about the use of discipline. With few exceptions this is a domain of research in which hypothetical, rather than real, parent-child interactions have been emphasized. The sampling of behaviors (over time and setting) has not extensive nor has it been common to measure the discrete sequences of parent child interaction and conflict in the disciplinary encounter. We have attempted to address some of the methodological problems by training family members to make observations of a range of specified affective interaction sequences over an extended period of time.

Twenty-four mothers and their children, 11 boys and 13 girls, participated in the study for a nine month period. The children ranged in age from 10 to 20 months at the beginning of the study. The mothers were white, high school and college graduates and they received some financial compensation.

Mothers were trained to report their children's behaviors and their own socialization practices as part of a more general and inclusive set of observation procedures in which they provided narrative, sequential, tape-recorded reports of their children's responses to the positive and negative emotions expressed in the familial environment. Mothers were asked to report incidents in which someone in the child's presence expressed emotions (e.g., anger, fear, sorrow, pain, discomfort, fatigue, affection, joy). Each incident account was to include a description of the emotion expressed, who was experiencing it, what preceded or caused the emotion, the child's reactions to the person expressing emotion and the mother's (or others's) responses to the child. The emotion events to be reported were those in which the child was a bystander to someone's emotion

and those for which the child was a cause of emotion. In this study of transgressions and discipline our focus is on only those incidents in whch the child was the cause of some difficulty and the parent intervened. A large set of such incidents were identified and found to provide a full range of child misbehaviors and of parental discipline charcteristically described in the research literature. Page 3 of the handout gives some examples of transcriptions of mothers' observations, from which different types of child misbehaviors and parental disciplines were coded.

Children's misbehaviors were categorized as: (1) Physical or psychological harm to persons; (2) harm to objects or property; and (3) lack of self control or impulse control. Children's compliance and noncompliance following initial discipline were also coded. Mothers' discipline techniques were (1) explanations, (2) tutelage and instruction, (3) verbal prohibitions, (4) physical punishment, (5) physical restraint, and (6) love withdrawal. Two other parental reactions were reported with significant frequency. They were (a) the dramatization or nonverbal highlighting of the misdeed, e.g., vocalizations or facial expressions of pain or sorrow, and (b) Reunification, defined as an interchange of affection between mother and child following the mother's use of discipline. Satifactory code reliabilitieswere achieved (in the low 80's). Mother and child behaviors were also assessed by home observers. During each of the 14 home visits children and mothers were rated as high or low on dimensions that might be expected (and, in fact, were found) to be related to mothers' observations.

Each discrete behavior within an emotion incident was coded and retained for analysis. Sequential coding makes it possible to distinguish between the forms of disciplines used before and after children's non-compliance, hence, to explore child effects at different points in the

transgression-discipline sequence and in relation to different types of transgressions. The contingencies between children's misdeeds and mothers' disciplines were examined in analyses of variance of conditional probabilities. Correlational analyses were used to examine the general patterning of associations between misdeeds and disciplines when the behaviors were summed over time. A total of 514 child transgressions and 1174 disciplinary actions were reported by the 24 mothers.

The effects of transgression type on the mother's discipline immediately following the child's transgression are reported in Table 1 in the handout. The finding that predominates here is that, immediately following a transgression, mothers were more likely to use verbal prohibitions than any other type of discipline, and this was similarly the case for all three categories of transgression. If children did not comply to initial discipline, mothers used additional discipline. Table 2 indicates the effects of children's noncompliance on subsequent discipline. Analysis of variance yielded main effects of transgression and discipline, and a transgression x discipline interaction.

Our primary interest is in the interaction of transgressions with discipline. Visual inspection of the table indicates that (a) use of physical punishment and love withdrawal is high for misbehaviors involving destruction of property and lapses of self control, relative to use of these techniques with harm toward persons, (b) physical restraint is used frequently for issues of self-control, relative to the other misdeeds, and (c) explanations and teaching are frequent for misdeeds toward persons and property relative to those involving issues of self-control.

Further analyses indicated that disciplines were used more frequently following noncompliance than before noncompliance. This increase, however, in frequency of discipline following noncompliance, characterized

transgressions of harm to objects and lapses in self control but not of harm to persons. Also, only certain forms of discipline increased in frequency following noncompliance: Love withdrawal, physical restraint and teaching.

Dramatization of distress by caretakers has not characteristically been conceptualized as a control technique. But it too may constitute a form of discipline. It does provide feedback to the child about the consequences for others of the child's misbehavior. In this study, dramatization occurred frequently, and predominantly in relation to transgressions involving harm to persons.

Some general differential patterns of associations between transgressions and discipline were also found in the correlations. Children who were frequently implicated in harm to persons relative to other misdeeds were especially likely to have mothers who used explanations ($\underline{r}(21) = +.45$). Children who were relatively frequently involved in property damage were likely to receive physical punishment, ($\underline{r}(21) = +.48$), and unlikely to hear explanations, ($\underline{r}(21) = -.45$). Frequent lapses of self-control in children were reliably associated with mothers' relatively frequent usage of love withdrawal,($\underline{r}(21) = +.43$).

Thus, young children, just past the first year of life, were found to engage in a variety of behaviors that required disciplinary intervention by their caretakers. The following generalizations are based on the composite of sequential and correlational analyses. Children's transgressions against persons tended frequently to be paired or associated with psychologically oriented forms of discipline (e.g., explanations and dramatization of distress). Destruction of property and lapses in self-control tended to be paired with parental techniques that incorporated displays of power and the exertion of strong controls (e.g., physical punishment and love withdrawal) though, of course, other methods of discipline were seen as well.

In this sample of mothers, there were consistent, significant differences in their use of forceful and physical discipline techniques. To the extent that we can extrapolate, these data may provide insights about some of the circumstances under which parents more severely hurt their children or put distance between themselves and their children. Several investigators have discussed the aversive qualities of persistent crying, unusual cry sounds, and other annoying, abrasive behaviors in young children, and how these may trigger assaultive behavior in the parent. Here, many of the misbehaviors labeled as lapses in self-control involved displays of negative emotion (temper tantrums, crying, etc.) These behaviors did lead predictably to mothers' use of physical methods of control in sequential analyses, and they were related to love withdrawal in correlational analyses. This pattern of findings invites speculation. Under optimal conditions of rearing, mothers of children who are relatively high on expression of negative affect may "learn" from early on to put some distance between themselves and their children in disciplinary encounters, possibly to prevent the occurrence of still more physically aggressive disciplines.

Children's misdeeds involving harms to persons tended to elicit a different form of communication from the parent. The dramatization or highlighting of distress through facial and bodily expressions as noted occurred almost exclusively in relation to children's interpersonal transgressions. These expressions of distress may, in extreme form, represent a nonverbal precursor of guilt-induction, the message from the parent being "see how your hurtful behaviors hurt me." Further, situations of harm to persons were <u>least</u> likely to culminate in affection from mother following discipline.

From the mothers' standpoint, reunification may represent attempts to ameliorate the potential negative effects of their perceived greater punitiveness in relation to children's misdeeds involving destruction and lack of impulse control. But from the child's standpoint the fact that person harm, relative to the other two offenses, leads frequently to expressions of dismay in the caretaker, followed by the" withholding" of affection, may help to make interpersonal transgressions particularly serious offenses.

These findings have implications for interpretations of direction of effect in studies of parent-child interaction. For example, when parental rearing practices have been shown to affect children's moral learning, the child probably has some role in shaping the content of the child-rearing practices as well: Parental techniques of induction reasoning may contribute to the internalization of moral and prosocial actions, but, at the same time, certain child behaviors and misbehaviors may increase the likelihood of the use of explanations. This hypothesized interaction provides an illustration of reciprocal effects as discussed by Bell. Ultimately it would be advantageous for conceptualizations of socialization processes to develop research designs that permit examination, within the same design, of the cumulative, multiple and interactive influences of caretaker and child upon each other.

Carolyn Zahn Waxler
and Michael Chapman

Table 1

Mean Conditional Probabilities of Initial Discipline Types

Given Transgression Type

Type of Transgression	A. Initial Disciplines: Type of Discipline						
	Explan-tion	Tute-lage	Verbal Prohib.	Physical Punish.	Physical Restrnt.	Love Withdr.	(Total)
Harm to Persons	.285	.122	.506	.112	.213	.105	.224
Harm to Property	.257	.159	.686	.093	.170	.049	.236
Lapse of Self Control	.150	.111	.645	.115	.185	.050	.210
(Total)	.231	.130	.613	.107	.189	.068	.223

Note: $N = 21$

Analysis of variance (sex x misbehavior x discipline) yielded a significant main effect of discipline type, $F(5,95) = 37.48$, $p < .001$.

Table 2

Mean Conditional Probabilities of Discipline Types

Given Transgression Type

B. Final Disciplines Given Noncompliance to Initial Disciplines

Type of Transgression	Type of Discipline						
	Explan-ation	Tute-lage	Verbal Prohib.	Physical Punish.	Physical Restrnt.	Love Withdr.	(Total)
Harm to persons	.180	.288	.281	.089	.273	.127	.206
Harm to property	.303	.284	.506	.314	.333	.273	.336
Lapse of self control	.128	.097	.607	.286	.556	.288	.327
(Total)	.204	.223	.465	.230	.387	.229	.290

Note: N = 18

Analysis of variance (sex x misbehavior x discipline) yielded: (a) a significant main effect of misbehavior, F (2,32) = 3.80, p <.05; (b) a significant main effect of discipline, F (5,80) = 7.08, p <.001; (c) a significant interaction of discipline x misbehavior, F (10,160) = 3.15, p <.002.

Examples of mothers' observation records from which sequences of children's misbehaviors and parental discipline practices are categorized:

(1) (Mary, 64 weeks.) "Mary has been in sort of a bad mood all day. We were sitting upstairs. I wiped Mary's nose with a Kleenex, and before I knew it she had bitten my finger, which she's been doing a little bit of lately. I bit her back--not very hard, and Mary turned around and cried; and then she bit her sister Sally on the arm, and so I spanked Mary. Then Mary started crying again and hit Sally and Sally started crying, and Mary started crying even more."

(2) (Jackie, 88 weeks.) "Jackie refused to get in his high chair. When I finally got him in, he sat there and screamed bloody murder. When I offered him food, it promptly landed on the floor. I told him to stop and smacked his hand, which resulted in more crying. We were getting nowhere, so I took Jackie out of his highchair. He calmed down so I offered him his lunch again at the dining room table. He picked around at it and then climbed into my lap. I was on the verge of tears myself, so when Jackie took his full glass of milk and turned it upside down on purpose, it was no accident, that was the last straw. I put him on the floor, burst into tears, and ran upstairs, kicking one of his toys out of my way. My aunt was downstairs. I knew she'd take care of Jackie and I just couldn't face one more thing at that minute."

(3) The past few days Judy (115 weeks) has been very aggressive towards her friends and towards me. This morning was a very typical incident. Judy was in bed with me after she had awakened and she was leaning back against my knees. I was lying down and her feet were resting against my face. She began to kick and I told her in a very calm voice but as firmly as I could that she should not kick me, that it hurt my face. She continued and I pushed her legs aside. I said, "That hurts mommy. Please stop it." She pushed her legs back again and continued to try to hit me. I finally pushed her off of my legs and said "Please stop it. It hurts me very much when you do that." Judy laughed when I said that, and with a broad grin on her face and with a great deal of emphasis, as if she were boasting, repeated "I pushed Billy", referring back to the incident which happened three weeks ago now, in the play pool.